

La Revue Agricole DE L'ILE MAURICE

Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Unrest on Sugar Estates in Mauritius, 1937.

CANE DEALERS OR INTERMEDIARIES.

The case of the small planter against the cane dealer.

290. The cane dealer belongs to a class of intermediary or middleman who, in relation to small planters, plays much the same part as is played by the *bailleur de fonds* in relation to the big planter and factory owner. In other words, he advances *faisance-valoir* or working capital to the small planter in respect to the forthcoming crop on the security of the crop itself. He is also under contract to supply factories with the canes produced by small planters. Cane dealers operating on a large scale are not numerous and probably do not number more than twenty in all, though there are many more small cane dealers scattered about the island. The general complaint of the small planters in connection with cane dealers is that owing to the conclusion of these contracts for the supply of their canes, (and this without their being consulted in any way), they are forced to dispose of their canes to the factory through the dealer and not to the factory direct. They claim that the dealer receives a payment from the factory of some 5 or 6 kilos of sugar per ton of cane for their services, to which they themselves would be entitled, if they were not forced to deal through the cane dealer. They also claim that cane dealers are unnecessary in the sugar industry since they fulfil no useful function. The small planters further complain that the conclusion of these contracts between millers and dealers deprives them of their liberty of disposing of their canes to the highest bidder. We have called for copies of the contracts entered into between cane dealers and factory managers and we are satisfied that in some cases the contracts contain clauses the effect of which is that the small planters of the district are bound to send their canes through a cane dealer and that if they themselves bring their canes direct to the weighbridge they will be refused. They are thus left the alternative

of taking their canes to a factory some distance away, sometimes at an increased cost of transport and, generally speaking, they are liable to have their canes refused owing to the operation of the limitation of area system.

Case for the cane dealer. Value of the cane dealer to the estate.

291. We have had the case for the cane dealer placed before us clearly by one of their number and he has set out in a memorandum submitted to us what he claims to be the advantages for both the small planter and the factory, of the establishment and maintenance in existence of the system of supplying small planters' canes to estates through cane dealers. In his opinion, it is to the advantage of the estates to deal with small planters through a cane dealer because :

- (1) the estates are unwilling to run the risk of making cash advances to small planters ;
- (2) they are glad to find a third party in the person of the cane dealer who is willing to run the risk of advancing money on poor security ;
- (3) should the estate make advances to the small planter without recourse to the cane dealer, it would be compelled to incur considerable expense in the shape of special employees to carry out the work normally performed by the cane dealer ;
- (4) the estate is assured of receiving a fixed quantity of canes to be crushed which have been properly cultivated.

Value of the cane dealer to small planters.

292. The advantages to small planters, according to this witness, in supplying their canes to the factory through a cane dealer are as follows :—

- (1) the small planter is certain to receive whatever he may require to ensure proper cultivation of his land and, if necessary, to extend the area under cultivation ;
- (2) since the estates do not wish to make advances, to small planters, the cane dealer, by making advances, places the planters in a position to meet their requirements for cultivation, without which they would be obliged to abandon their holdings and perhaps sell them at low rates ;
- (3) the activities of the cane dealer are in the best interests of both the small planter and of the estate as the cane dealer has at his disposal means to control the advances he has made ;
- (4) the estates are assured of an almost uniform daily consignment of canes and in this way the small planters can finish cutting their canes at a time convenient for the estate to take them.

Useful services rendered by cane dealers.

294. The complaint against cane dealers is one of the most bitter we have heard. We are satisfied, however, that the claim put forward by the cane dealers that they do in fact render certain useful services to the small planter is justified; and it must be borne in mind that in many cases the advances made by way of *faisance-valoir* have, indeed, no more substantial guarantee for repayment than a lien upon the forthcoming crop, evidenced by a promissory note, the only charges payable in connection with which are stamp duty levied *ad valorem* on the amount shown in the note and stamps on the receipts showing repayment of the loan. The cane dealer, like the *bailleur de fonds* has to run the risk of seeing his security diminish, or even disappear entirely, should a cyclone or a drought overtake the colony, against none of which can he insure. It is true that the Co-operative Credit Societies make advances to their members by way of *faisance valoir*, but these advances are secured upon the unlimited liability of the whole of the members of the particular society concerned. There are thirty-five Co-operative Credit Societies in all, scattered through the island, but the total number of members does not at present exceed 2,035, out of a total of some 20,000 small planters. It is therefore clear that the majority of small planters requiring advances for *faisance valoir* cannot get any from the Co-operative Credit Societies who, moreover, select their members with great care.

Conclusions and recommendations.

296. We are satisfied from what we have heard in evidence that cane dealers play a part in the present financial organization of the sugar industry in advancing *faisance-valoir* to small planters in circumstances where neither a factory nor a Co-operative Credit Society would do so. In our opinion they are free to contract direct with small planters if they wish to do so, on any terms upon which they are able to agree. But the evil part of the system, in our opinion, is that which deprives the small planters, who are under no financial obligation towards the cane dealers, of their freedom to send canes to the factory of their choice, under their own name or that of their legal representative, and on terms arrived at in direct negotiation with the factory either personally or through their authorized representatives. The general principle to be observed here should be that the small planter must not be adversely affected, nor his liberty of action taken away, by any arrangement entered into by factories and cane dealers unknown to him.

LIMITATION OF AREA

The system of limitation of area.

297. Small planters generally complain of a system, to which we have already referred, known as the "Limitation of Area" system. A typical complaint is that submitted to Government in a petition dated the 12th of April 1937, for which we have called, addressed to the Governor by Mr. C. Hurdowar, the President of the Rose Hill Corps-de-Garde Co-operative

Credit Society: In this petition, which was signed by Mr. Hurdowar as president of a Special Committee selected by the chairman and secretaries of the whole of the Co-operative Credit Societies of Mauritius assembled at a conference on the 15th of September, 1936, he states that practically all mill-owners of Mauritius have established a limitation of area system, arising out of an agreement arrived at by the estate owners, in accordance with which the small planters of a specified area are compelled to send their canes for crushing to one particular factory and no other. As a result of the establishment of this system, mill-owners are not prepared to allow small planters to deal directly with them but compel small planters to deal with them through cane dealers or middlemen appointed by the estates. The petitioners asked for the abolition of the limitation of area system and, in particular, that the Co-operative Credit Societies should be allowed to deal direct with the mill-owners. We have dealt in a preceding paragraph with the question of cane dealers or middlemen and have stated that we are satisfied that the systems of limitation of area and of cane dealers or middlemen operate in confirmation.

The case for limitation of area.

298. The case for limitation of area, as placed before us, is that it is an attempt to avoid wasteful competition amongst mill-owners in the purchase of small planters' canes and that it secures a definite supply of canes for a specified number of years. The position of the sugar industry, it is argued, has come to such a pass that something must be done to avoid the possibility of one estate outbidding another in the crushing of small planters' canes. The system works as follows. A group of estates come to what appears to be a regional agreement whereby the parties undertake to purchase canes from one specified area and no other and that, sometimes, through the offices of a cane dealer. In this way the sums paid to the small planters for the crushing of their canes by the factories are kept down to a minimum. We have already stated that this appears to us to be evidence of an attempt on the part of the sugar industry at co-operation and co-ordination.

Limitation of area to be by regional agreements.

299. In principle, we agree that as matters stand now it is in the interests of the sugar industry as a whole to avoid the ruinous competition which would result from outbidding each other for small planters' canes. Moreover, we think that the proceeds of the sugars of the Colony should, as far as possible, go to the planters and mill-owners, and we believe that it is not in accordance with sound economic principles for part of such proceeds to be expended in the unnecessary transport of canes from one area to another. To these general principles to which we adhere, however, we wish to make an important reservation. We think that when agreements of this kind are entered into, the small planters, either individually or through representatives, should be consulted. We think that no small planter whose land is situated at a point nearer to a particular mill than any other in the district should be expected, without his consent, to take his canes to a mill further away and thereby be put to greater incon-

venience and expense. We think the system should be operated by means of regional agreements to be entered into between mill-owners and representatives of small planters on terms agreed to by them. We suggest that a possible way of setting about the conclusion of regional agreements of this sort is by means of the Standing Committee of Small Planters, the setting up of which we recommended in paragraph 263, in direct negotiation with representative estate managers. In our view, the principle to be recognised here is that of free agreements, freely entered into by the various parties concerned. We deprecate the existence of contracts entered into between mill-owners or their representatives without the knowledge or consent of the small planters who are so vitally affected by them. We think that it is essential that no contract should be concluded with regard to limitation of area, which is not known and concurred in by the small planters and, incidentally, by Co-operative Credit Societies, who are directly affected. We consider that the determination of the amount of sugar to be left to small planters as recommended in paragraph 260 will contribute powerfully towards the solution of the two problems dealt with in paragraphs 290 to 298, for once the small planter is assured of a quantum of sugar determined on a fair basis, it will be a matter of indifference to him by what mill his canes are taken.

Conclusions and recommendations.

321. We have come to the conclusion that the representations made by small planters to the effect that they are entitled to enjoy facilities similar to those accorded to big planters by the Agricultural Bank are justified, and we recommend that steps be taken to grant them such facilities, for small planters are now borrowing money at rates which vary between 8% and 12%, which we think should be reduced. Whether effect should be given to this recommendation by reducing from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 1,000, the minimum amount of loans granted by the Agricultural Bank or by the creation of a new institution dealing with loans to small planters, for a minimum amount of Rs. 1,000, is a matter which can best be decided in conjunction with the Managing Director of the Agricultural Bank. We are inclined to think, however, that there should be no insuperable difficulty in the way of the Agricultural Bank dealing with this matter, which would of course entail an increase in the staff of the Bank.

CONTROL OF WEIGHBRIDGES.

Control of weighbridges.

322. Small planters complain that they have little or no opportunity to control the weight of the canes delivered by them to the weighbridge. They also allege that they cannot check the accuracy and proper working of the weighing machine. These statements are denied by estate managers, but whatever the truth of the statements may be, we think that small planters should in all cases be allowed to check the weighing of the canes upon arrival at the weighbridges and that a periodical inspection of the weighbridges should be carried out by Government inspectors. We believe that the estates themselves have no objection to the institution of control

by a Government Inspector. We also recommend that steps be taken to ensure that the weights and the weighbridges be tested at least once a year by a Government Inspector and stamped by him to the effect that both are correct. We further suggest that a great measure of satisfaction would be given to small planters by the establishment of a system whereby a representative small planter could be present at each weighbridge at the time the canes are weighed and could certify that the weight of each consignment of canes delivered at the weighbridge is correct.

Delays at factory in accepting canes.

323. Complaints are also made that carts carrying canes to the factory are frequently made to wait some hours, a process which may cause loss to both small planter and carter. Estate managers have informed us that it is true that delays occur, but that this is usually due to a break-down in the factory. Delay is also caused, according to them, owing to the fact that small planters send their canes to the factory at inconvenient moments. We are satisfied that carters are obliged sometimes to wait with their carts in idleness in the factory yard. These delays in our opinion could easily be avoided by a little organization and collaboration on the part of small planters and factory managers and we recommend that the question be examined by the Standing Committee of Small Planters in conjunction with estate managers.

THE COMPLAINTS OF THE WORKERS

Wages paid to estate labourers.

325. We deal first of all with the question of the wages paid to the estate labourers on monthly contract of service; and in doing so it is essential to bear in mind, as we have indicated, that the actual wages paid to estate servants are supplemented by rations and that they are housed at the expense of the estate and receive in addition free medical attendance. This is prescribed by the Labour Ordinance of 1922 (Articles 91 to 144); and in addition, the estates themselves make periodical *ex gratia* payments in cash and in kind. The amount of wages prescribed by law (Article 38 of Ordinance No. 12 of 1922) to be paid to estate labourers who are new immigrants is a minimum of Rs. 10 per month.

Rations for estate labourers.

326. The rations are prescribed as follows:—

Rice	...	...	...	750	grammes	per diem
Dholl	...	...	...	250	„	week
Salt fish	...	...	...	250	„	„
Ghee or Oil	...	...	...	125	„	„
Salt	...	...	...	125	„	„

These rations correspond to the principal normal ingredients in the daily diet of the average Indian, who, incidentally, is not a meat eater. It is provided by the Labour Ordinance that in cases where dholl or salt fish are very scarce in the market, the estate may allow one of these substances to be given for the other. The rations which are at present issued free to the labourers are rice, dholl, oil and salt only. In most cases, however, amounts considerably in excess of those stipulated are given, with the exception of salt fish.

Rates of wages to estate employees.

327. The minimum of Rs. 10 provided for new immigrants by law is not now paid by all estates and we set out in the Appendix a table showing the actual sums paid by estates as set forth in the returns of wages paid supplied to the Commission by the estates. On the other hand, some estates pay more than Rs. 10 per month. We recommend that in future it should be made optional for estate labourers to continue to accept part payment of their wages in rations or to ask for cash payment of wages for their services without rations. In cases where estate labourers continue to accept rations in part payment of wages, we recommend that the food hitherto given to them should be more varied and should include salt fish whenever possible, for we have come to the conclusion that the labourers are suffering more from defective nutrition than from under-nutrition.

Complaints as to rations.

329. The complaints of estate labourers who say that their wages are not sufficient are principally directed towards wages paid in kind; and we now proceed to examine these complaints. The principal complaints we have heard from estate labourers with regard to their rations are of two kinds. The most usual complaint is that the quality of the rations is bad. They allege that the rice gives off an offensive odour when cooked and is of poor quality, and the same is the case in respect of the dholl or lentils, which they say is frequently of the type given to animals to eat. The other complaint is that they do not always receive the full weight of rations to which they are entitled. Some labourers, again, have complained of short weight. They say that whereas they should receive 24 lb. of rice they received only 22½ lb. Complaints have also been made with regard to the nature of the coconut oil supplied and the salt. We are satisfied on the whole that the labourers have no serious ground for complaint as to the condition of their rations, the more so as estate managers have frankly admitted that on occasions defects had been brought to light in the condition of rations issued, but that immediate steps had been taken to remedy the defects. At the same time, we are satisfied that in certain instances the nature of the rations might be varied and as regards rice we recommend that the grade known as Calcutta rice should be given in future instead of the Rangoon rice at present supplied.

Housing conditions.

Again, there is the great danger of straw huts catching fire, which does not apply in the case of concrete huts. We have heard conflicting opinions as to whether a concrete house or straw hut is preferable, but we believe that the general policy of estate managers is to support the replacement of straw huts by concrete huts, and we also believe that this policy is in the general interests of the Indian labourers.

Control by the Department of Labour.

333. As we have said, we do not think there are any serious abuses on the estates, but we recommend that the new Labour Department should take in hand the question of fixing definitely the hours to be worked, the nature of the tasks, the food, housing, accommodation and hospital treatment to be meted out to the estate servants. The regulations governing these matters, which are out of date, should be revised and estate labourers should be made aware of their rights and duties. We think that steps might well be taken by the Department of Labour, in conjunction with estates, for the formation of social clubs and athletic associations which, in our opinion, are bound to do good.

Conclusions and recommendations.

336. We have come to the conclusion that the average day labourer, all things considered, is underpaid and it may well be that he and his wife and children are underfed. The question of the nutritive value of the food consumed is one primarily for the scientist to determine. In any case, we have seen that it has been stated in the Council of Government in categorical terms that the workers in the sugar industry in 1935 were underpaid and underfed and that they were going on being underpaid and underfed. Whatever may be the precise value of these statements as a whole, they certainly mean that people in the island, well acquainted with the situation of the labourers, were satisfied that they were underpaid and underfed. In our view it is not so much a question of underfeeding amongst labourers, generally at the present time, as of malnutrition due to lack a variety in diet. We do not wish in any way to prejudice the work of the persons eventually to be entrusted with the duty of fixing finally minimum wages, nor do we think that very large increases of pay are justified ; but we are of opinion that the wages of casual labourers should be increased by at least 10 per cent. in cases where no increase was made during or after the strike and we recommend that this should be done.

(To be continued).

A COMMENTARY ON FACTS

by ALFRED D. BRITTER

VIII

PURCHASE OF PLANTERS' CANES

The question of the Purchase of Planters' canes has been raised, and an attempt made by small planters, especially Indian Planters, to make a grievance out of the system in force in Mauritius for the acquisition of canes by the Factories.

We will not deal with the question of delimitation of areas, although this alleged grievance has been advanced by certain small planters. We believe that the Managers of Estates, whose evidence has been heard by the Commission have sufficiently proved that the measure is in the interests of the planter as well as of the factory.

It is alleged on behalf of the small Planters that the Factories do not give them a fair price for their canes, or that the basis on which their canes are purchased by the Mills is unfavourable to the planter.

We will examine the facts and endeavour to elucidate the situation.

The present system of the purchase of Planters' canes has been in existence for many years, i.e., the basis of payment in terms of sugar per ton of cane delivered at the Factory.

We do not propose to work out the figures to ascertain whether the factories or the planters make a profit or loss by this system, as the calculation depends entirely on two factors, viz : the ruling price of sugar, and the prevailing cost of production in field and factory, and as both these factors are likely to vary from one season to another, it would serve no useful purpose to work out these costs.

In any case, these costs and the different aspects of the question have often been worked out, and there is a lengthy literature on the subject.

So far as the grievance of the Planters is concerned, however, all the evidence and all the literature in this matter show that the present complaint formulated by the planters is entirely without justification.

The present basis for the settlement of planters' canes is that the factory gives the planter an average ranging between 67 and 72 kilos of sugar per ton of cane supplied. The cost of transport is generally incurred by the factory.

We will endeavour to show that this basis is more favourable to the planter than that adopted for the settlement of planters' canes in other Sugar producing Colonies, and that whenever the question has been studied and closely considered in Mauritius it has been clearly demonstrated that, not only is the basis of 70 kilos of sugar per ton of cane not unfair to the planter, but that it is unfair to the factory and should be reduced.

The basis on which payment is made by factories for planters' canes in the West Indies is generally as follows :

In Trinidad : 5 per cent., of the price of 1 ton of sugar FOB for each ton of cane, less certain deductions to cover the cost of transport, packing and selling sugar, etc.

In Jamaica : The usual basis is 5 per cent., of the selling price of sugar.

In the smaller West Indian Colonies the basis adopted is about the same as above ; the system varies somewhat in each Colony, but a careful computation of each system would show that in each case the planters receive slightly less or slightly more than 5 per cent., of the value of sugar FOB, but considerably less than they receive in Mauritius.

We are reproducing in the appendix attached to this survey, the comments made by the West Indian Sugar Commission in 1930, on this question of purchase of canes by the factory.

In Mauritius the basis of payment of 70 kilos of sugar per ton of cane, works out to about 7 per cent of the price of one ton of sugar per ton of cane, i.e., if we allow for all the various technicalities of the comparative basis of the computations, the planter receives from the factory in Mauritius at least 25% more than he does in the West Indies.

In Cuba the position of the planter is even worse than in the British West Indies. We see in the West India Sugar Commission Report, page 35 paragraph 96, that purchase of cane by the factories is made "at a price based on the market value of sugar", the basis varying in different parts of the Island from $4\frac{1}{2}$ lbs to 6 lbs of sugar per 100 lbs of cane. The Cuban Government publishes at intervals the average FOB price on the basis of which cane growers are paid".

This is equivalent to 4.5 to 6 per cent., as against about 7 per cent., in Mauritius.

We mentioned above that this question of the purchase of planters' canes had been dealt with on numerous occasions in Mauritius, and that there was a lengthy literature on this subject.

The scope of this survey does not allow us to outline all the issues raised over this question, but it is clearly established that it has been recognised by all concerned, and by all who are competent to frame an opinion on the matter that planters have always been better treated by the Factories in Mauritius than they are in other sugar growing countries.

If we limit ourselves to the opinion of competent officials who have studied this question in the past we will find the same view expressed.

We find in the Report of the Department of Agriculture for the year 1913, signed by Mr. F. A. Stockdale, Director of Agriculture in Mauritius from 1912 to 1916 (and now Sir Frank Stockdale, Kt., C.B.E., M.A., Chief Agricultural Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies) the following comment on the question of Planters' Canes :

"The small planters received fair prices for their produce ; prices, which, considering the price of Sugar on the World's Market, on the whole compare favourably with prices that would have been obtained if supplied to factories on a contributory co-operative basis, on terms similar to those in vogue in other sugar-growing countries".

At the Mauritius Sugar Industry Conference of 1927, the System of Purchasing of Planters' Canes was one of the most important subjects considered, and the Report of the Debates gives us a full account of the opinions expressed. (Vide Transactions and Debates of the Mauritius Sugar Industry Conference 1927).

In opening the Debate on the subject, Dr. H. A. Tempney, Director

of Agriculture in Mauritius from 1916 to 1932 (and now Asst. Agricultural Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies), spoke as follows in the course of his address on the Memorandum he had prepared :

“ That system tends to operate unfavourably to the factory when prices of sugar are low (Price of sugar in 1927 was about Rs. 10.— per 50 kilos) because the amount of sugar given for cane is on the high side. The competition existing for cane is at the root of this. While everyone desires that planters should be paid at the highest possible rates, if prices become forced up too high a level, the usiniers may be paying for canes as actually has occurred in the past year prices that are in excess of what they can expect to obtain from the sugar manufactured from these canes after the cost of manipulation in the factory has been deducted. ”

In the course of the same debate, Dr. Tempany further expressed his view : “ What I wanted to convey was that when sugar prices amount to Rs. 20.— per 50 kilos or something of that sort, the usinier comfortably can afford to pay a larger proportion of sugar than he ordinarily does and still make a fair profit. I do not wish to convey that factory owners frequently made disproportionately large profits. When big profits have been made these have gone to compensate very small profits made in other years. The essential point I wish to bring out is that in the majority of cases at the present time and during an average term of years usiniers are often paying for canes higher prices than in almost any other country in the world. ”

The basis of payment at the time was 70 kilos of sugar per ton of cane (the same as it is at present). (Vide Mauritius Sugar Industry Conference 1927. Transactions and Debates — printed 1928, Government Press, Port Louis.)

The fact that planters are always grumbling against the prices they receive from the factories, is universal. In all sugar countries, especially since sugar prices have dropped and the quantity of sugar the planter receives has decreased in value, complaints are frequent by small planters who do not understand the real situation of affairs, or who are induced to misconstrue it.

In 1927, the Factory owners were complaining that, owing to the low price of sugar, the quantity of sugar which the factory had to give away to the planter, made the manipulation of planters' cane a losing proposition to the miller. The price of sugar in 1927 was Rs. 10.— per 50 kilos. In 1937 the Factory owners are being accused of not giving enough sugar to the planter. The price of sugar is now less than Rs. 6.25 per 50 kilos.

And yet the Mauritius Sugar Conference of 1927 found that the higher the price of sugar the more the factory could afford to give to the planter, and, as Dr Tempany said (Vide above quotations from Debates) “ The system tends to operate unfavourably to the factory when prices for sugar are low. ”

An appropriate remark on this tendency of the planters to complain is to be found in the same Debates of the M. S. Conference of 1927. We again quote from Dr Tempany : “ In any event unfortunately it is a recognised fact that high prices are paid for canes of the small planter. If the price is lowered they will believe that they have been illtreated. The only possibility is that ideas on the necessity of some revision of the existing basis

should be fostered until the position is better understood. *Whether in Mauritius or elsewhere planters will always be out to get the best place they can* ; it is not peculiar to Mauritius, it is the same everywhere."

"The necessity of some revision" referred to by Dr Tempany was a reduction of the quantity of sugar given to the planters, in view of the low prices of sugar ruling at the time (1927 Sugar @ Rs. 10. — per 50 kilos).

Dr Tempany had expressed the view that ideas on the necessity of some revision of the existing basis (70 kilos of sugar per ton of cane) should be fostered until the position is better understood.

As we have seen during the present unrest, other ideas have been fostered in order to induce small planters to demand a revision of the system in a radically opposite direction.

The present claim of the small planters for more sugar per ton of cane is so preposterous, that it is evident that the ideas fostered amongst them during the last year or so had only one purpose, viz : to induce the small planters to join in the unrest which had been worked up amongst the labourers, so as to build up a case against the Sugar Industry by alleged victims of various categories.

We could continue on this subject of planters' canes by submitting all the evidence available, the whole of it pointing in one direction, viz : *That planters receive better treatment in Mauritius from the local factories than they do anywhere else, and that the quota of sugar given to them is really more than the factory can afford to give.*

The scope of this survey does not allow us to include the monumental evidence available, but there is just one point we would like to deal with.

At least one witness before the present Commission submitted in his evidence that the Royal Commission of 1909 had recommended that 2/3rds. of the sugar extracted from the cane should be given to the planter. This was pure invention on his part or on the part of those responsible for his "knowledge".

The Royal Commission recommended nothing of the kind. Their remarks on this question of planters' canes add further material to the evidence we have outlined above ; the following extracts from their Report give their views on the subject :

"We did our best to ascertain whether there were any real charges against factory owners of harsh or unfair treatment in regard to their relations with small planters — charges which were brought forward in a general and somewhat indefinite way by a few witnesses".

"We examined a number of small planters belonging to different districts — some of them in private — but we obtained no evidence which we could regard as justifying any such general charges. We are not prepared to say that there never have been cases in which a factory owner or manager has taken undue advantage of his position in his dealings with small planters ; but no proof of such a case was established before us".

(Vide Para. 74, Royal Comm. Report 1909).

In Para. 72 the Commissioners refer to the prevailing basis for purchasing planters' canes : "From 65 to 70 lbs of sugar per 1000 lbs of canes appears to be the usual rate".

Apart from Para. 74 quoted above the Commissioners made no

reference to the basis of payment, and, we need not add, no recommendations at all about 2/3rds. of the extraction, as mentioned in his evidence by the witness referred to.

IX

CONDITION, STATUS AND TREATMENT OF INDIAN LABOURERS

During the recent unrest on the Sugar Estates and in the course of evidence before the Commission, a strong and apparently determined effort has been made to allege that the condition of the labouring population of Mauritius is miserable and wretched, that the treatment they receive on the Estates is very bad, that they are under fed, badly housed, and overworked; in fact that their situation is hardly removed from a condition of slavery, and that all these ills could be removed or redressed if the Industry and the authorities were not so indifferent to the plight of the mass of the labouring population.

We will endeavour to deal with these various points. In view of the purely political and personal ends that have inspired and prompted all this upheaval it may appear to many that some of the issues raised are too absurd to be worth refuting; we believe, however, that the results of the agitation have been too serious, and the events brought about far too grave, to allow this chapter of grievances to pass unchallenged. The danger of such statements is their subversive effect on the simple and ignorant people amongst whom they have been broadcasted. Notwithstanding the evident difficulty of dealing effectively with such sweeping accusations as those referred to, it is certainly necessary to clear the ground thoroughly so as to show how false and misleading they are and how pernicious is the lip-service that panders to cheap popularity by harping glibly on the condition of the masses.

It is, unfortunately, a recognized fact that the making up of alleged grievances invariably falls on sympathetic ears when addressed to the unenlightened; and if the defence of the "under-dog" is carefully staged it seldom fails to strike some responsive chord in the minds of those who imagine that the monopoly of humanitarian instincts has been conferred upon them by special ordination from above.

Evidently it is impossible to take a comprehensive view of the condition of the labouring classes in Mauritius without bringing the whole situation into its proper perspective. It is essential, if we wish to examine the issues in a dispassionate spirit that we should start off by creating something like a background; that we should not isolate the issues and localize them on the assumption that they are peculiar to Mauritius.

It is obviously necessary that we should consider the facts in a general perspective, and cover some broader and wider ground before we pick up a grievance or an aspiration and pronounce a narrow sentence "prima facie".

A study of the history of the Indian Population of Mauritius, carried out with a positive mind and in a comparative sense, would establish the situation in realistic form.

It is a history which gives us a clear picture of progress and evolution, of relative destitution and indigence gradually evolving into independence and prosperity, within the inexorable limits and inevitable restrictions imposed by the economic conditions of a small self supporting Colony.

Witnesses before the Commission, some of them belonging to a class which leads us to credit them with a sense of responsible evidence, have declared that the Indian labourers in this Colony were considered as animals, that they were treated as slaves, that they were downtrodden, and that they were reduced to a state of abject misery by hard work, long hours, bad housing, under-feeding, etc.

One witness, a medical man, actually declared that what he termed " the degenerate condition " of the labourers, had been caused by these conditions ; that since immigration from India had been stopped and fresh stock could no longer be introduced, the vitality of the labouring population had deteriorated to an alarming extent, owing to the circumstances under which they existed here and the prevailing conditions of work, nourishment, etc.

It is obviously essential that we should prove all such statements to be absolutely false and radically opposed to all the evidence available on the subject ; it is imperative that we should expose these irresponsible declarations for what they are worth by showing that the conditions of existence, work, food, housing and of life generally for the Indian labourer have improved out of all comparison with what he could obtain in India, that he has improved his status enormously since his arrival in this Colony that, as regards what the medical witness, referred to, declared before the Commission, fresh immigrant stock from India was never considered at any time in the past as introducing fresh vitality, but, *on the contrary*, that the mass of the immigrants was invariably composed of poor, emaciated creatures, most of them destitute and without stamina or strength and that it was, precisely, after residence in Mauritius for some considerable time, and after enjoying the favourable conditions prevailing in Mauritius, that they became robust, that they acquired strength, vitality, etc.

In retracing the authoritative evidence on these issues we will eliminate all opinions which could be accused of having been influenced by local interests, and will submit only evidence from Official Reports or Statements by competent authorities and observers without any stake in the Colony and whose judgment, in view of their position, cannot be questioned.

We will go back to a period, in 1845, when thousands of Indian immigrants had been about 10 years in the Colony, and when according to official records there were over 45,000. We will then proceed in order of date, in brief historical sequence, to outline such authoritative evidence as we can conveniently embody within the scope of this survey.

Justice Neave's Report 1845.

The first report is by Mr. Justice Robert Neave, of the Bengal Civil Service, Sessions Judge of Azimgurh, who submits his Report to a Com-

mission in 1845 appointed to consider questions regarding the terms of engagement of Indian Labourers proceeding to Mauritius as emigrants from India.

“ The Coolies referred to are a distinct class. They are called Dhangars or cooles from the Ramghur district, where I was Resident Magistrate from 1829 to 1832. Having known these Cooles or Coolies intimately I am free to testify that whatever may be their condition in Mauritius, it is better than that in which they live at home. They are, in fact in their own fastnesses, but little removed from primitive barbarism; their wants, it is true, are few, nor do they labour much, but they gain a bare subsistence only, and money is a thing they very rarely have. Few even possess ten rupees at any one time during their lives. They are utterly unused to luxuries of any kind in eating or dress, which is scanty in the extreme.”

“ Respecting their condition in Mauritius and in their own country there can be no manner of doubt whatever in the minds of those who have had opportunities of seeing them in the two countries. *It is the difference between affluence and poverty, robust health and squalid disease, comfort and discomfort, independence and abject submission to mandates often not very considerate or kind. I need not say on which side the advantage lies. It is in every way with the Mauritian labourer.*”

Mr Justice Neave further referred to his conversations with labourers who had returned to India after a term of engagement in Mauritius: “ Not one of them who had resided in Mauritius made the slightest complaint on any score whatever while their dress and their looks evinced beyond all doubt the excellence of the treatment with which they had met. The greater part (many of them from districts in which I have presided) freely acknowledged that they came to Mauritius because they had not enough to live on at home.”

In another part of his report Mr. Justice Neave explains that all the emigrants to Mauritius were not necessarily of the destitute classes which composed the majority: “ Though many of the Indians of the higher, or, I may say, highest caste, do come to Mauritius on account of family disputes, yet a very large numbers come to better themselves, and, moreover, they succeed in so doing.”

Regarding food the labourers received in Mauritius Mr. Justice Neave says: “ Their diet in Mauritius is fully as good as that procurable by the better class of field labourer in India; very many of this class would consider themselves well off with this food. For ghee and other articles given them in Mauritius they do not even hope in India.”

Regarding medical attention in India, the Report says: “ The utter want of any respectable medical attendance is one of the crying evils of the country, which the Indian Government is now occupied in removing, although a very long time must elapse ere this can be done, even partially. Besides the negative evil of absence of aid, the country is inundated by a flood of professors in the art of medicine who are as unscrupulous and extortionate as they are ignorant and impudent. The mischief which these men do is only proportionate to the blind credulity of their dupes. Hundreds of lives are lost every month in this way, while others, less fortunate than those who die, live on in tortures caused by the so-called remedies.

The benefit conferred on the Indian in Mauritius in the way of medical attendance is incalculable".

It is certainly interesting to compare the above passage of Mr. Justice Neave's Report to that of the medical witness who deposed the other day before the Commission, and who made a determined attack on the medical attendance the Indian labourer received in Mauritius, and which he declared, had always been very bad.

The Report refers to the rate of wages in India as compared to those in force in Mauritius at the time. He submits a long statement of wages for various vocations and occupations, from which we reproduce the following. A Bearer, Rs. 4, per month; ordinary gardeners Rs. 3. to Rs. 4. per month; A Jemadar, Police Officer commanding 4 to 6 men Rs. 6 to Rs. 8 per month. "All artificers, masons, and other artisans, according to their skill, from 2 to 4 annas per day. *They labourers in agriculture seldom get money, but are paid in grain.* ?"

Further references to the condition of these people in India are contained in Mr. Justice Neave's Report and indicate the terrible situation there: "Many of the lower classes live on weeds, wild fruits and berries; many no doubt die of hunger. So urgent is the call for food that some people cut and eat their small crop before it is fully ripe."

In his Report Justice Neave refers to a statement made by another witness to the effect that in India the Ryot (or petty farmer of from 4 to 5 acres of land) would enjoy an infinitely better position as a field labourer in Mauritius at Rs. 5. per month. He says "This statement seems to be borne out. The Ryot's five acres would not give him nett Rs. 30. per annum or Rs. 2. 1/4 per month from which he has to find everything, whereas in Mauritius his five rupees per month is positively for pure enjoyment, or it may be accumulated, as all absolute necessities, and many luxuries too, are provided by the employer."

The Report concludes, on the following note: "It is not my purpose to go into the details of the treatment experienced by labourers in Mauritius. I have been satisfied by ocular demonstration that they are in all respects benefited by the change. Not seven tenths of the people in India have lodgings like those afforded to the people in Mauritius. The food furnished is such as none but those in India, in easy circumstances, can obtain. In medical attendance the Mauritius labourer has that which, in the greater part of India, money cannot command. His pay and profits are much greater, and every labourer has an absolute certainty of obtaining redress for injuries. I regret to say that such is not the case in India."

After referring to the fact that the laws in Mauritius were all in favour of the immigrant, Mr. Justice Neave refers to the kindness and generosity of the treatment given to the Indians in Mauritius, and to the necessity for more firmness in dealing with them, owing to the demands which, in 1845, they were making on the employers; he adds: "No one requires this more than the Indian, whose general character is to rise in his demands the more he is pampered and cared for. I never knew a man in India for whose relation I have provided who did not consider that he had thereby acquired a species of right to have the rest of his family similarly provided for. You cannot satisfy an Indian in general."

The Brennan Memorandum 1845.

We would wish to refer also to a Memorandum on the Immigration question prepared by Mr. R. Brennan, who was managing the Estates of the Telfair family in Mauritius. Mr. Charles Telfair had for many years represented the Colony of Mauritius in London, and Mr. Brennan's Report was addressed to Mr. D. G. Gordon of the Immigration Commission.

Mr Brennan had lived in Bengal and Mauritius, and his report starts in the following terms : " I consider I cannot better support the opinion I have given you that the Indian labourer materially betters his condition by emigrating to Mauritius than by placing before you a simple statement of such facts and observations, as my connection with agricultural pursuits, both in Bengal and Mauritius, has brought under my notice, and enabled me to make. "

This Memorandum is far too long to reproduce but it offers an admirable comparison between the appalling conditions existing in India and the relative paradise which Mauritius offered to the Immigrant. After examining all the conditions of existence of the same classes in India, Mr Brennan describes " seriatim " the relative position in Mauritius : " I shall now turn — and I confess, with something of the feeling of one who is leaving a prospect where all is barren and desolate, for one of smiling prosperity — to the condition of the Indian labourer in Mauritius. "

We reproduce one extract from Mr. Brennan's Memorandum, in order to deal with the point raised by the medical witness before the present Commission, as regards the fact that the immigrant deteriorated in health and vigour, and that the present labouring population would not have degenerated had immigration not been stopped.

Mr. Brennan says : " That the health of the Cooly in most instances materially improves by his residence at Mauritius, is a fact that must be obvious to every observer. In most instances, I have observed that the Cooly had landed here *a poor sickly emaciated creature and after the lapse of a few months* presented the pleasing contrast of an individual in the perfect enjoyment of health, whose form had filled out and whose muscles had become, comparatively, well developed. " In another part of his Report he describes the enormous surplus population in India who cannot find work, and can never secure even the barest pittance ; he refers to : the " thousands of thousands if not millions of men who cannot find regular employment and who in consequence suffer frightful misery, even to be obliged to sell their children at times for food. This is the important question that ought to be thought of in considering emigration from India to Mauritius. A wide field of industry and labour is thrown open to destitute thousands. "

Legislative Council Special Committee Report 1845.

We would also recommend for perusal the complete official report of the Committee of the Legislative Council of Mauritius in 1845, appointed to make recommendations regarding the Labour Law and the period of engagement of labourers from India. The Committee was presided by

Mr. Rawson W. Rawson, Treasurer General of the Colony (later Sir R. Rawson, Governor of the Bahamas and the Vice-Chairman was the Procureur and Advocate General.

The Report is too lengthy to allow of any reproduction, but the state of the immigrants on arrival in Mauritius is commented on in a special paragraph, and it further confirms what we have reproduced above. In paragraph 17, the report says : " It is clearly proved by the evidence taken before your Committee and by the Comparative Statements of labour performed by different classes of labourers that, for the first few months after their arrival, a large portion of the Indians are exceedingly inefficient through sickness and weakness and are able to perform but a small portion of an ordinary task."

Comparing the immigrants who have been here several years and the new arrivals, the Committee give what they evidently consider to be a striking testimony in favour of the older hands : " These are looked upon as the Aristocrats on an Estate. The Creole women will form connections with them rapidly ; but much less frequently with the new men." (Vide paragraph 34 (3) of the above Committee's Report).

It is practically impossible to give even extracts from the Reports of all the Committees or Commissions that have considered the question of the condition of Indian labourers in Mauritius from the time of their first arrival in the Colony ; there is a monumental literature on the subject, and the whole of it shows conclusively and beyond any question that the Indian labourer has vastly improved his status and his condition in every aspect by his residence in Mauritius.

In case it should be argued that if the labourer has stayed in India his condition would have improved in the same way, we need but refer to the exhaustive literature on present conditions in India ; the most casual perusal of this literature, official, authorised, and descriptive, would show us that, in so far as the " inarticulate " masses are concerned their condition has not changed very much in the last 100 years. (Vide Appendix).

The history of the Indian labouring population in Mauritius is a history of gradual progress, and the only restrictions on this progress are those that have been imposed, inevitably, by the economic limits within which everything revolves in this Colony.

Frere, Williamson (1875) and Muir Mackenzie (1893) Reports.

For further evidence of the treatment of labourers in Mauritius we would refer to the Frere, Williamson Commission Report of 1875, and to the Muir Mackenzie Report of 1893.

Royal Commission 1909.

In 1909 the Royal Commission, composed of Sir Frank Swettenham, Sir Edward O'Malley and Mr. Woodcock, held a very comprehensive enquiry into conditions in Mauritius, and although their enquiry was mainly concerned with the financial and economic situation of the Colony, advantage was taken of their presence here by certain agitators to try and manufacture grievances for their consumption. Inevitably, some of the

evidence submitted to them referred to labouring conditions prevailing at the time, and the Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence (H.M.'s Stationery Office, London, 1909) show the agitators at the time were harping on very much the same tune as they have done before the present Commission.

In the course of the examination of Sir Graham Bower, K.C.M.G., Colonial Secretary, the question of the Indian population was raised, and the following dialogue is worth mentioning : Sir Frank Swettenham : " Are they likely to get out of control ? " Sir Graham : " There has been an agitation amongst them lately, and you must expect, *in the course of time*, that educated Indians, who are usually spoken of as Baboos, will move amongst them and agitate. "

Sir Frank : " Agitate for what ? "

Sir Graham " I cannot very well say, but there is a movement going on in India which will have its reflection in Mauritius. "

Sir Frank : " Do you think there is any intimate connection between educated Indians of Bengal and the people here ? "

Sir Graham : " We have got a legal gentleman, who is a barrister, who is in close touch with the Indians. He is an educated Indian of India. "

The educated Indian referred to by Sir Graham Bower was a certain Mr. Manilal Doctor, who, prior to the arrival of the Commission had been going round on the Sugar Estates, and holding meetings, and generally acting in very much the same way as the present agitators have been doing recently. He had held numerous meetings on Estates, and had secured resolutions about the bad quality of the Rice, etc., wages, housing and about the weighing of the canes at the factory weighbridges.

The evidence of this Mr. M. Doctor before the Commission is worth reading ; in one of his Resolutions at a meeting held at Riviere des Anguilles he had referred to the weighing of the canes " when a great deal of cheating is done. " The Commissioners asked him what authority he had for such an accusation, and he replied that by the word cheated he had meant " taking advantage of somebody by pressure. " He added : " I am sorry that you have put a legal construction on a word which I had used in a non-legal sense. "

Sir Frank Swettenham : " But this is casuistry. "

Mr M. Doctor : " You hold me responsible for using the word " Cheated " in a legal sense ! "

Sir Frank : " Certainly, because you were talking to very ignorant people. "

We mention this dialogue as it very much resembles the reply of the President of the local " Parti Travalliste " before the present Commission, when he said that when he informed a meeting that the Sugar Industry had made a profit of Rs. 20 millions last year, he did not mean 20, he meant any figure ; figures did not matter, 1, 2, or 6 millions ; he meant a large profit.

As the accusations brought by Mr. M. Doctor in the course of his meetings were very much the same as those raised before and during the present unrest, it is interesting to read the views expressed by Sir Frank Swettenham on the condition of the Indian population, and his opinion of the agitator's activities.

mortgage his land to engage special trains for his guests and to provide bands and other luxuries for their amusement. He will thus spend his income for perhaps 5 or 6 years to keep his position."

The above quotation shows that the evolution of the Indian had become noticeable in 1912, i.e. 25 years ago, and that it is no new feature as some would have us believe.

Another quotation from Mr. Wilberforce concerns the small Indian planter and his defective methods of cultivation : " It is not sufficient to provide the necessary means and education for efficient culture : *defective culture should be penalised* and this can be effectively done by the mill-owners themselves by exercising a better control over the purchase of canes."

The above is interesting in view of the Uba question.

Harriott Report 1913.

Mr. G. M. Harriott, C.S.I., C.I.E., etc., in his report says : (Page 48, Cap. XXI, para. 184. (11) " I need not repeat here the remarks made by me in my Preliminary Report on this subject. After further experience and consideration, I can confirm them fully and still hold that the Indian field labourer here is well treated by the planters, is very well looked after by the Protector of Immigrants, and is more prosperous than I have found him anywhere else."

Mr. A. Walter's Views, 1915.

The views of Mr. A. Walter on the question of the condition of the labourer here and of the influence of wages on that condition are of great interest.

Mr. A. Walter, F.R.A.S., Director of the Royal Alfred Observatory, Census Commissioner for Mauritius in 1911 and 1921, author of " The Sugar Industry of Mauritius ", etc., was probably the keenest observer and the most analytical mind the Civil Service of Mauritius has had in its ranks. His knowledge of conditions in the Sugar Industry was unique. He had been nearly 30 years in Mauritius when he was promoted as Chief of the Bureau of Statistics in Kenya.

In one of his Reports, published in the Mauritius Almanac of 1915, Mr. Walter discusses the question of wages and of the condition of the labouring population.

" The important question is, " wrote Mr. Walter, " does the present rate of wages provide a living wage for the labourers ? " " of this the whole history of the Indian population in Mauritius, as recorded in the various reports of the Protector of Immigrants and evidenced in their present condition as land holders appears to be sufficient proof. An increase in the rate of wages out of proportion to these requirements does not unfortunately have the desired effect of increasing the available labour, but on the contrary, permits the Indian to work three days instead of six days in the week."

" An increase in the rate of wages arising out of the condition of the Industry itself is to be devoutly wished for and encouraged ; the conditions for example, which arise from a demand for more skilled labour, from greatly extended operations or from a greater demand for the produce of

the Industry, thus leaving higher profits. In the case of the Mauritius Sugar Industry such conditions do not obtain ; on the contrary if the cost of production has decreased slightly this is due to unusual effort on the part of the planters to establish a balance between expenditure and revenue as the latter diminishes with a falling market."

The above quotation from Mr. Walter is interesting for several reasons : (1) That in his opinion not only had the prevailing wages afforded the Indian a living wage but had enabled him to become a landowner and better his position generally. Wages in 1914 (Vide Blue Book) were : Efficient labourers Rs. 8 to Rs. 10. per month. Less Efficient Labourers Rs. 6. to Rs. 7. per month. Rations were exactly half what they are now. (2) That in his opinion, higher wages would enable them to work 3 days instead of 6, (and yet labour witnesses during the present unrest have declared that if they absent themselves once or twice a week it is because the work is so hard and fatiguing). (3) That in his opinion the Sugar Industry could not afford to pay higher wages in 1914.

The prices of sugar ruling from 1910 to 1914 were as follows. Rs. 7.09 : Rs. 9.68 ; Rs. 7.60 ; Rs. 7.00 and Rs. 11.33 per 50 kilos nett ; at present it has been ranging between Rs. 5.60 and Rs. 6.25 for the last 3 years, and yet the labour witnesses declare that the Sugar Industry can pay higher wages, as at the present rates (which are higher than those mentioned by Mr. Walter in 1914) the labourers " are starving."

Sir Kunwar Maharaj Singh Report, 1924.

In 1924 Mr. Kunwar Maharaj Singh, M.A., C.I.E., (afterwards Sir Kunwar, later High Commissioner for India in the Union of South Africa was delegated by the Government of India to make an inquiry in Mauritius on the possibility of renewing immigration from India. His report is of vast interest as he commented on the situation of Indians here, and as an educated Indian himself his views are certainly worth reproducing.

After enumerating the possessions of the Indians and all the lines of activity in their hands, and all the signs of their prosperity in the Colony, Mr. K. M. Singh says : (Chap. 3, Para. 14). " The fact that the Indians in general have improved their condition in Mauritius is evident to any one who has experience of rural conditions in India and who knows the classes to which immigrants belong."

" Poverty of course, exists in Mauritius, as elsewhere, but it prevails on a lesser scale, and is less in evidence than in India."

" The fact that Indians have thus prospered speaks highly in favour not only of their economy and their labour, but also of the Government and of the people of the country where they have been able to acquire this prosperity."

In 1924, when Mr. K. M. Singh was in Mauritius earnings of free day labourers which had reached a very high level during the boom years 1920-21 had begun to go down to normal, but it is interesting to observe that Mr. Singh foresees the decrease of wages " in view of the decrease in sugar prices." (Para. 36).

In the same paragraph he says that it is generally believed that a reduction in the cost of living will entail a decrease in wages, but he does

not think that "one can expect a substantial reduction in the cost of living so long as the price of Rice — the staple food of the Indians — has not incurred an appreciable and permanent decrease."

It is obvious therefore that Mr. Singh expresses no alarm at the prospect of a decrease of wages, if the price of Rice goes down.

As we are aware and as the facts can show Rice prices have dropped from an average of Rs. 18 per bag of ration rice in 1924 to Rs. 9.—in 1936 ; i.e. by 50 per cent. (Vide Appendix).

We believe we have submitted sufficient evidence to show conclusively that the whole history of the Indian labouring population in Mauritius is a picture of contentment and of gradual progress, and that this picture is radically contrary to that which labour witnesses, labour leaders and others of the same political views have endeavoured to demonstrate to the present Commission.

The point may be raised, however, that the picture we have drawn above represents past conditions and that the grievances now alleged as existing refer to present day conditions.

This argument, in the first place, would be absurd, as practically all the Commissions and Committees we have referred to above, from 1845 up to 1924, had been appointed to inquire into precisely such allegations as from time to time had been made by agitators—allegations, many of them of the same nature as those brought forward at present. We have shown, in at least one case, that in 1909 the Royal Commission had to deal with allegations of bad treatment, bad housing, bad food, low wages, short weight at weighbridges, etc., and we have seen how the Royal Commission dealt with them.

Another argument which may be brought forward is that if conditions existing in the past were good enough then, they are not necessarily good enough now. This is all very well from the ideal point of view, but we are not living in an ideal world, and as we have endeavoured to indicate in the first part of this survey, this social issue must be considered in a general perspective ; an isolated Colony such as Mauritius is governed by prevailing world conditions. These world conditions circumscribe the status of the labouring population engaged in such an industry as Colonial Sugar, and establish inexorable limits, owing to the operation of economic laws over which we have no kind of control and for the existence of which, the Sugar Industry, assuredly, cannot be held responsible.

There are certain social theories to which advanced and generally irresponsible idealists in Europe are frequently giving lip-service, to the effect that the standard of living of a community should be above and independent of economic considerations, and they even go to the lengths of declaring that wages paid in an industry should not be controlled by prices obtained for the produce of the industry. It is evident that such theories, even if they are of practical application in Europe, cannot apply in communities in the position of those of the sugar producing Colonies where there is no home market, and where industries are entirely at the mercy of outside conditions, over which they can have no control.

This fact has been recognized by the Socialist Governments of both Great Britain and France when these Governments have been in office.

We have before us the condition of employment of workers on Sugar Estates in Madagascar for instance. The wages apply to 1937 conditions.

On the Estates belonging to the Sucrerie Marseillaise de Madagascar (Domaine de Manakia) the minimum wages fixed by the French Government for men under contract are Fcs. 2.50 per day (25 cents of a rupee at the present rate of exchange), plus 800 grams of Rice, Salt and Housing. The Company actually pays more than the minimum wage ; they pay Fcs. 3.00 per day (or 30 cents of a rupee) if the labourer works at least 20 days a month, or Fcs. 2.75 if less, and the rations are 900 grams instead of 800.

Lord Passfield's Instructions.

We would also point out that the British Socialist Government was in power in 1929 when the crisis in the Sugar Industry got so bad that the Colonial Secretary, Lord Passfield, had to appoint Commissions of Inquiry to the West Indies and Mauritius. It is surely interesting to see whether Lord Passfield or Lord Olivier, both Socialists and fellow-members of the Fabian Society, ever referred to the urgent need of improving the condition of the Sugar Industry labourers, as a social necessity independent of economics.

We can supply evidence that they did nothing of the kind when the opportunity was afforded them to examine facts and issue Statements of Policy.

In May 1930, Lord Passfield, Secretary of State for the Colonies, after receiving the report of Lord Olivier and of Sir Francis Watts on the West Indies and Mauritius, issued special instructions to the Governors and Administrators of those Colonies, as to the measures to be taken to deal with the critical situation existing, and although in his despatch he makes a special appeal to the Sugar producers to reduce their costs of production, by all means, at no point does he make reservations about labour.

We quote from Lord Passfield's despatch on 25th May 1930 to Colonial Governors : " As far as the Policy adopted by His Majesty's Government in dealing with the Sugar situation is concerned, I would refer you to the Statement of Policy in regard to the West Indian and Mauritius Sugar Reports, of which the text has been telegraphed to you and prints will now be in your hands. I would especially invite attention to the remarks at the end of my speech of March 5th, in which I pointed out that other industries were in the same position, etc., etc.

" In order to afford the Sugar Industry a better prospect of a satisfactory future it is clear that every effort must be made to reduce costs and improve methods, so as to place it in a better position to compete with the Sugar Industries of other countries. "

When Lord Passfield actually instructs the Sugar Industry to use " every effort " to reduce costs, he makes no reservations about keeping up Labour Wages, as obviously he was aware that in order to be in a " better position to compete with the Sugar Industries of other Countries, " labour would have to be content with the wages which the Industry could afford to give them.

In point of fact these instructions were issued (May 1930) before Lord Passfield could have known that the Sugar Market was on the verge of further collapse. How much more definite and urgent would the war-

ning have been, had the Secretary of State been able to foresee the disastrous series of years ahead?

It is evident that, as the Reports of the West Indian and of the Mauritius Sugar Commissions had not found anything unduly wrong with the rate of wages in force under the general conditions prevailing, Lord Passfield, who was a distinguished economist of international reputation as well as a Secretary of State, was not likely to raise issues which his sense of perspective and his appreciation of the order of things led him to consider as being outside the range of the political theories of his Government.

Indeed, Lord Passfield, who had been Chairman of the London School of Economics, and author of several treatises on Labour questions, could hardly have overlooked the fact that under existing world conditions, market prices must govern wages, and economics dominate the standard of living.

Lord Olivier's views on wages.

We would like to add that a perusal of the Report of the West Indian Sugar Commission would convince one that Lord Passfield's fellow-member of the Fabian Society, Lord Olivier, entirely concurs in this view of things.

Whenever Lord Olivier referred to Labour he stressed the point that wages had to depend on prices.

"The wages are very low, but it appeared in the course of evidence given us that it is recognised by labourers that *higher wages can hardly be paid with sugar at its present price* or without the reduction of the numbers employed." (1929, Sugar at Rs. 8.50 per 50 kilos in Mauritius), Vide Page 44, W.I.S.C. Report. "The employers desiring to pay *as high wages as possible* and the labourers recognizing that *existing conditions* in the Sugar Industry *did not permit* of higher wages at present." (Page 51).

"We have considered above the effects of a continuance of present market conditions (Sugar at Rs. 8.50 in 1929). Should the Imperial Preference be removed (Preference in 1929 was only 3/8.8d per cwt. and market has since dropped by as much) these effects will very rapidly cease almost entirely, or so far as it survives, *be carried on on a basis of even lower wages than now prevail.*" (Page 69).

These quotations, by themselves would be sufficient to show that, in the view of Lord Olivier, wages in the Sugar Colonies must in the course of events, be governed by sugar prices, and that, he even foresees the prospect of wages decreasing if the price falls to lower levels.

As a matter of fact he places on record that the labourers themselves prefer to have lower wages and to have work available for everybody, than to compel the Industry to pay higher wages, with a *reduction of the numbers employed.*" (Page 44, Para, 120).

In fact Lord Olivier considers this "as one of the causes of high costs of production in the fields. This *is not due to high rates of wages, but rather to the extravagant use of low-paid labour?*"

The position is somewhat similar in Mauritius; the Sugar Industry has to give work to as many people as possible, and this obviates the necessity of a reduction of the numbers employed.

Colonial Office Experts' views.

This danger of mass unemployment brought about by a reduction of the numbers employed through better cultural methods or through the introduction of mechanical tillage on a large scale is fully realised at the Colonial Office. We are aware that Mr. S. Caine, who was Secretary of the Olivier Commission in 1930, and one of the signatories of the Report, and who, since 1930 has had special charge at Downing Street, of all matters relating to the Sugar Producing Colonies, is aware, not only of this fact, but also, and especially, of the dire straits through which the Sugar Industry has passed during this last decade, and of the paramount importance of safeguarding its vital interests in view of the world economic conditions in which it is struggling, and of the momentous issues dependent on its precarious existence.

The conditions prevailing in the Sugar Industry of Mauritius are indeed well-known at the Colonial Office. As it happens, Mauritius was singularly fortunate in having the services of two eminent Directors of Agriculture for a period of 20 years, Mr. F. A. Stockdale, and Dr. H. A. Tempany.

We have already referred to Mr. Stockdale's and Dr. Tempany's definite views regarding treatment of small planters in Mauritius.

The former (now Sir Frank Stockdale, M.A., M.Sc., C.M.G., C.B.) is at the present moment Chief Adviser in Agriculture to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

That Sir Frank could have passed 4 years in this Colony and not observed that agricultural labourers were working under distressing conditions, none would be prepared to believe. Sir Frank's numerous Reports as Director of Agriculture during his service here are available, and in his numerous surveys on agricultural conditions there is not the slightest evidence that he had noticed the adverse conditions which are alleged to have existed. It will be agreed that it would have been a singular oversight for an extremely capable Director, whose distinguished services have earned him the eminent and responsible office he now occupies.

Sir Frank has been in his present position since 1933, and thus better placed than most to ascertain whether Agricultural and Labour conditions in the Sugar Colonies and, in particular, in the Colony where he himself has served, are as bad as those agitators would have us believe.

X

CONCLUSION

We have endeavoured in the foregoing summary to give an outline of such authoritative evidence as we have been able to procure from past records. We have proved beyond question that all the competent authorities who have inquired into the condition of the Indian labourer in Mauritius have all, invariably, expressed the view that he has improved his position immensely by coming to Mauritius, that he is better looked after and provided for, that he has been given more freedom and independence to evolve than he would have in his own country or in any other country where East Indian immigrants have settled.

We have concluded our list of competent authorities by including the opinion of a distinguished Indian, Sir Kunwar Maharaj Singh M.A., C.I.E., who cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be accused by the Indians here, of prejudice towards them.

Sir Kunwar's opinion is evidently not prompted by a desire to please the non-indian elements when he declares that the prosperity of the Indians here is due not only to their economy and labour but to the Government and "*the people of the country where they have been able to acquire this prosperity.*"

Sir Kunwar was aware, of course, as everybody else is aware, that for many years now, the greatest portion of the buildings of Port Louis belongs to members of the Indian Community, many of whom had immediate ancestors who came here as immigrants; that all the branches of commerce and trade have been encroached upon and have largely fallen into the hands of Indians; that 55,000 acres of cane lands belong to the Indian population; that 95% of the land under vegetables belongs to them, that 90 per cent. of all the carts in the Colony, 95 per cent. of all the milch cows belong to them; that the whole milk trade, the poultry and egg trade, the important manure trade, are handled entirely by Indians; we could add, also, that 80 per cent. of the busses, taxis and lorries belong to the Indian population; that if an estimate is carefully carried out the extraordinary fact would be revealed, (and it would explain a lot of things) that *as much as 75 per cent.* of the male adult *labourers* of the Indian population are also owners of plots of lands throughout the Colony, or possess some other means of revenue, and are thus not dependent on wages.

Regarding the grievances raised during the recent unrest, we have shown that these have often been raised in the past by agitators, and that after consideration by competent inquirers these grievances have been shown to be either unfounded, or not peculiar to Mauritius, or of a nature consistent, in the general economic scheme of things, with conditions elsewhere.

In an isolated community, where the mass of the working classes has no contact with the outside world, there is bound to be complete ignorance about conditions obtaining elsewhere, and it is extremely easy for any educated agitator, to lead them to believe anything he wishes them to; if the agitator keeps on drumming into their minds that conditions elsewhere are better, and if he goes on long enough, in meeting after meeting, repeating his assertions they are miserable and wretched, that they are downtrodden, starved, overworked, under-fed etc, that they are the victims of all kinds of ill-treatments and malpractices, sooner or later there is bound to be a response and a reaction by the simple and ignorant people to whom the exhortations are addressed.

When agitation has been carried on in an entirely unrestrained manner for over 18 months, with a systematic covering of district after district, estate after estate; when the meetings have been followed up by the surreptitious and clandestine operations of active agents; when all these manœuvres have been executed without any reply or countermove by the interests attacked, it is evident that the time must come, *inevitably*, when the ignorant mass, thus subverted, becomes sincerely convinced that they are victimised, and that it is *up to them* to obtain redress.

When it is evident, as we contend is the case in the present unrest, that the upheaval is not spontaneous, in the sense that the leadership and the general direction have not sprung from elements of the Indian labouring population itself, but from *disappointed* politicians of an entirely different class of the people, the situation assumes a significance of its own.

The more we reflect on the situation the more we are convinced that this persistent agitation has been extremely unfair to the Indians themselves, and prejudicial to their own interests as well as to the interests of the Industry and of the Colony in general.

The frequent dangling before their eyes of a substantial improvement in their condition ; the glittering prospect of a realisation of all kinds of aspirations ; all these efforts, whether political or altruistic, have undoubtedly led to the events we have just witnessed.

It is certainly within the realm of probabilities that the Quota restrictions on our Exports of Sugar from the Colony may lead to the restriction of the area cultivated in Mauritius, and to the adoption or rational methods of intensive cultivation on a smaller total area. The danger cannot be overlooked that such measures may lead to a reduction of the total number of labourers employed in cane cultivation, and, in the absence of other industries to absorb them, it is quite possible that, instead of the better conditions sparkled before them, a greater degree of unemployment may prevail amongst the labouring classes of this Colony.

The adoption of any form of intensive cultivation to produce a restricted output on a smaller area constitutes a menace to labour employment. The same effects may be brought about by the use of mechanical tillage on a greater scale, and in the West Indian Sugar Commission Report of 1930, this danger to labour is outlined in Para. 121 on Page 44.

" Any immediate change from manual to mechanical cultivation would cause unemployment, especially in Barbados, where a working class witness strongly deprecated it on this account, but we believe that, if the industry is to survive and be prosperous, at least part of the solution is to be found in obtaining higher yields per acre by mechanical cultivation."

It is evident that, under the conditions prevailing at present in this Colony, the agitation carried on amongst the labouring population has consciously or unconsciously overlooked all these issues. We do not wish to impute any blame to the labourers themselves, as it is a recognized fact that the vast majority of them was satisfied with prevailing conditions up to the time the agitation started, and moreover, the attitude of labourers on Estates showed clearly that the majority was not in sympathy with the organisers of the trouble, but that, in most cases, they were terrorised by organised gaungs and had to adopt a passive attitude and submit to the marching orders of the terrorists.

As we have seen, the economic situation of the Colony and the admittedly difficult period through which the mass of the workers is passing, have made the manufacture of alleged grievances a comparatively easy matter. The prevailing atmosphere was propitious for the opportunist, and ruling conditions facilitated the sowing of the wind by those who were least likely to lose in the reaping of the whirlwind.

The agitation willingly or unwillingly, has led to unrest, violence, upheaval, bloodshed and death.

The Industry responsible for 97 per cent, of the economic resources of the Colony, for the Machinery of Government, for the welfare of the community, has suffered serious prejudice.

In view of the bitterness aroused, and the human passions engendered, the situation is still pregnant with possibilities for the future.

It is not a matter of grievances calling aloud for redress. It is uniquely a narrow political cause, playing on broad issues with successful opportunism, and achieving a general effect surpassing all expectations.

The Indian labouring population is not consciously responsible. It is merely an inarticulate pawn conveniently utilized by the agitator to serve political ambitions that have been rendered desperate by successive defeat.

(To be continued).

NOMOGRAMMES

Tous les laboratoires de l'île connaissent et utilisent les nomogrammes de M. Auguste Esnouf pour le calcul de la Récupération. Nos chimistes accueilleront avec satisfaction les deux nouveaux nomogrammes établis par notre ami et collaborateur pour le calcul de la Pureté, à partir du Brix et du pourcentage de saccharose, qu'il s'agisse de jus, de clairce, de masse-cuite ou de mélasse.

On peut se procurer ces nomogrammes aux FORGES TARDIEU; le prix en est de Rs. 5. — pour le jeu de deux nomogrammes.

Statistiques

Marché des Grains

1938							
						Juillet	Août
Riz ...	...	75 Kilos	...	...	Rs.	9.00	Rs. 9.00
Dholl ...	...	75 „	...	...	„	12.00	„ 12.00
Gram ...	...	75 „	...	...	„	13.00	„ 13.00
Avoine	...	100 „	...	...	„	10.00	„ 10.00
Son ...	...	100 „	...	...	„	16.00	„ 16.00

Marché des Sucres

Le Syndicat des Sucres avait vendu les quantités suivantes au 27 Juillet 1938 :

COUPE 1938-39

16,500 Tonnes de Raws @ Rs. 5.25 les % livres.

11,750 „ de Grade A @ Rs. 6.11 les % livres.

Moyenne générale — Rs. 5.61

